Secrétariat
aux affaires
autochtones
Québec
Direction des services à la clientèle

Notes pour l'allocution du ministre délégué aux Affaires intergouvernementales canadiennes et aux Affaires autochtones

Monsieur Benoît Pelletier

À l'occasion des célébrations de la Journée nationale des Autochtones du Congrès des peuples autochtones

Château Laurier
Ottawa
21 juin 2004

(La version lue fait foi.)

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Protocolary greeting,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to thank my former colleague, Professor Joseph Magnet, and the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples for inviting me here to take part in this conference on the occasion of National Aboriginal Day.

I have just come from a special family activity organized in honour of this special day by the Canadian Museum of Civilization. As you know, there are all sorts of National Aboriginal Day events and activities being held all over Québec and Canada. I believe that this confirms the fact that Aboriginal peoples are an integral part of our country's cultural fabric and heritage.

I am pleased to be here with you today to discuss the economic development of Aboriginal nations. I am also proud to go over some of the important initiatives that have been taken by the Québec government in this regard.

But before I address the economic development of Aboriginal communities, allow me to explain you the philosophy of the Québec

government with regards to Aboriginal affairs and to take stock of our government's actions during its first year in power.

Nous croyons que nous sommes à un moment de notre histoire où il est impératif de renforcer les liens entre les peuples autochtones, le gouvernement du Québec et l'ensemble de la société québécoise. Il n'y a pas de doute que la coopération a fait des progrès remarquables au cours des dernières décennies. Au-delà des conflits particuliers, de nombreuses ententes ont été conclues, ouvrant la voie à des règlements de long terme. Mais il nous reste encore plusieurs étapes à franchir avant de réaliser cette grande ambition que nous nous sommes donnée de voir les peuples autochtones atteindre une autonomie acceptable aux plans politique et économique, et ce, dans la dignité et le respect.

L'affirmation des droits des autochtones doit maintenant se matérialiser dans des accords avec les gouvernements. Des ententes globales et spécifiques ont déjà été conclues, mais nous ne sommes qu'au début d'un processus complexe qui exigera beaucoup de détermination. Comme l'a mentionné l'ancien juge en chef Lamer de la Cour suprême du Canada, « Il faut se rendre à l'évidence, nous sommes tous ici pour y rester ». Nos avenirs sont désormais inséparables.

Au point de départ, il s'impose de voir la réalité autochtone du Québec dans toute sa diversité. La population autochtone compte environ 80 000 personnes, soit 1 % de la population totale, dispersées dans l'ensemble du territoire et réparties dans 10 nations amérindiennes et une nation inuite. Les quelques 8 000 Inuits du Grand Nord sont uniques par leur langue et leur culture et aussi du fait qu'ils n'ont jamais été assujettis à la Loi sur les Indiens de 1874. Ils ne disposent pas de conseils de bande et ne sont pas soumis aux exemptions fiscales accordées aux Indiens.

La diversité des nations est amplifiée par celle de leur milieu physique. Les amérindiens du sud habitent près des villes et sont plus intégrés à la société environnante. Le défi de l'identité y est donc plus grand. La préservation des langues se heurte à de nombreux obstacles. Dans les régions éloignées, les autochtones pratiquent souvent des activités liées aux ressources naturelles et à leur milieu traditionnel. Les langues autochtones sont généralement plus vivantes mais leur cohabitation demeure difficile.

Les 11 nations autochtones comprennent 53 communautés dont la taille de la population varie considérablement et ajoute à la diversité. En outre, plus d'un amérindien sur quatre habite hors réserve,

souvent pour des raisons économiques et démographiques. La proportion est de 6 % chez les Inuits. Certaines communautés ne comptent que quelques dizaines d'effectifs, ce qui complexifie la prestation de services.

La réalité autochtone est multiple et ce n'est pas un fait nouveau; il en était ainsi bien avant l'arrivée des Européens. La mise en œuvre des droits autochtones doit donc prendre en compte la multiplicité des situations.

Deux principes doivent nous guider : la reconnaissance mutuelle et la coopération. Ils découlent de la longue route que nous avons parcourue ensemble et de la nouvelle jurisprudence qui élargit les droits des autochtones. Mais il ne s'agit pas uniquement de questions de droits et de pouvoir. Si nous voulons que ces deux principes aient une résonance réelle, nous devons, dans leur mise en œuvre, prendre en compte les conditions fondamentales de notre cohabitation. Il faut trouver la sagesse de revoir les attitudes que nous entretenons les uns envers les autres, de partager des intérêts économiques, des appartenances, des lieux et des patrimoines où nous pourrons vivre concrètement la reconnaissance mutuelle et la coopération.

The objective of the Québec government with regard to Aboriginal affairs is to put in place the key elements that will allow our relations with Aboriginal nations to evolve and progress. We are working steadfastly to develop relations that are built on mutual trust and respect by promoting various forms of partnerships.

One of the accomplishments we have good reason to be proud of is the revival of our relationship with First Nations political authorities through the creation of a discussion forum. This initiative enables the parties involved to sit down together, communicate profitably, and decide on common orientations.

A year ago, the Premier of Québec, Mr. Jean Charest, and the Regional Chief of the Assembly of First Nations of Québec and Labrador, Mr. Ghislain Picard, signed a Mutual Political Commitment which led to the creation of the Joint Council of Elected Representatives last fall.

This Council, which is composed of Québec ministers and First Nations chiefs, has met four times since last October for discussions on territory, natural resources, fiscal matters, the economy and even services to Aboriginals living on and off reserves.

Thus far, the effects of this bold and highly innovative initiative have been very encouraging. We have also created two joint tables, one for fiscal matters and the other for economic development. They are making good progress and the experience is turning out to be a positive one for all concerned.

Of the different negotiations embarked upon, the importance of those involving the Inuit should be recognized. The June 2003 signing of a framework agreement marked a turning point in our relations with Nunavik. This agreement deals with the amalgamation of certain institutions and contributes to the unified and harmonious development of public services in the region.

We are confident that the framework agreement, which is in step with the progress made over the past 30 years, will allow the people of Nunavik to achieve a greater level of self-government. In fact, we plan to keep up the momentum and sign an agreement-in-principle on the first phase of this initiative by this fall.

Still in 2004-2005, the Québec government will be allocating 15 million dollars for the Sanarrutik Agreement. This agreement concluded with the Inuits of the Nunavik in 2002 was designed to promote hydroelectric development, parks development, roads

network improvement in the communities, and public security services in Nunavik's 14 localities. These investments therefore have a constructive effect on the Inuit nation's rapid economic growth.

Something else that we have been working very hard on, getting past a very critical stage, is the agreement-in-principle signed last March 31st between the Innu First Nations of Mamuitun and Nutashquan, and the governments of Québec and Canada. After almost 20 years of negotiations, we can now look forward to concluding a treaty with the Innu nation within the next few years.

Québécers and Innus have been sharing the same territory for four centuries. The time has come for talks leading to the conclusion of a treaty to provide, not only a clear definition of the ancestral rights of the Innu nation and formal recognition of these rights, but also a determination of the effects of these rights and how they are to be exercised.

These different political actions have allowed us to maintain dialogue and work together towards common goals. I am convinced that by promoting an inclusive vision, we are helping to boost the economic development of both Aboriginal communities and the regions.

By following up on the Paix des Braves, we chose to continue on with work that had already been begun, and have even expressed our intention of doing more. In 2004-2005, the amount allocated to the realization of this historic agreement is 70 million dollars. This money will be used to improve the economic conditions of Cree communities and will therefore have a positive impact on the development of the whole James Bay region.

Of the beneficial outcomes of the Paix des Braves, the Eastmain 1 hydroelectric project is of considerable importance. Over 2000 James Bay Cree and non-Aboriginal workers are currently on site.

This brings me to a measure that is considered to be a development lever for Québec's aboriginal communities: the Aboriginal Development Fund.

There are two parts to this Fund, which was created in 1999 with a five-year budget of 125 million dollars, one for economic development and the other for community development. We are currently reviewing the program and a preliminary assessment shows positive results that even surpass our objectives.

Thanks to the Aboriginal Development Fund, there are approximately 30 new businesses in Aboriginal communities. That means 30 initiatives in support of Aboriginal development, notably through job creation and reinforcement.

We are talking here about 1100 jobs that have been created or reinforced, 50% of which are held by people under 30. This is eleven hundred more people who are participating in the economic life of their communities! There is no need to tell you how important these jobs are to Aboriginal communities. The more dynamic Aboriginal entrepreneurship is, the more young people who benefit from it.

What is more, every dollar invested by the Fund in the 363 projects it supported generated an investment of $2.60 from other funding sources. These numerous achievements involve such vital sectors of activity as support for development, tourism, sports and recreation, and forestry.

In addition to the results posted, I must admit that I am thrilled by the extent of the Fund's direct effects on the quality of our relations with Aboriginal communities. Thanks to this program, our respective communities have forged many new ties and reinforced existing ones. We are also very pleased that the partnerships derived from these

projects have helped Aboriginals develop management skills and know-how.

To sum up, the Aboriginal Development Fund has made it possible for communities to become truly aware of their needs, which leads me to believe that the best is yet to come. At present, 87 million dollars are committed and 62% of this amount is invested in community infrastructures, which shows just how great the needs of the communities are in this respect.

Plus que jamais, il est impérieux que nous reconnaissions les Autochtones pour leur contribution tangible à l'évolution de la société canadienne.

Mais la véritable reconnaissance ne peut être que juridique. Elle doit être vécue. Nous devons la voir et la vivre concrètement dans notre cohabitation. Les non-autochtones doivent se rappeler que les nombreuses tentatives d'assimilation ont laissé des cicatrices qui demeurent sensibles. De leur côté, les autochtones doivent comprendre qu'il faudra du temps avant de modifier les mentalités. Il ne faut pas craindre de nous voir tels que nous sommes et que nous avons été, pour mieux comprendre ce que nous voulons être, ensemble, demain.

L'histoire nous a éloignés, mais elle nous a aussi rapprochés. Nous partageons un héritage commun imposant. Les autochtones ont apporté une contribution inestimable au développement du Québec. Tout au long de notre histoire, les échanges commerciaux, linguistiques et culturels ont laissé une multitude d'empreintes toujours visibles et vivantes. D'une certaine manière, les autochtones font partie de nous et nous faisons aussi partie d'eux.

Il n'y a pas de doute que la société québécoise est fière de l'héritage autochtone et qu'elle tient à le conserver comme partie de son patrimoine et de son histoire. L'identité québécoise s'est nourrie de la langue, des techniques et de la culture autochtones. Les œuvres inuits ou amérindiennes font désormais partie de la culture québécoise et canadienne.

In concluding, I would like to emphasize the fact that National Aboriginal Day provides an ideal opportunity to recall and reaffirm the values underpinning our relationships with Aboriginal nations.

For the Québec government, to build and prosper means that we want to enhance partnerships and approach community and regional development from an inclusive perspective. In this manner, we will

contribute to leaving a prosperous economy to future generations. Never before have so many efforts been devoted to a vision of the future that is shared by the Québec government and Aboriginals.